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ABSTRACT

Youth clubs can counter the many social changes taking place in Britain which have led in recent decades to disadvantagement for rural young people. At 2%, the British agricultural work force is the lowest in the world, unemployment is particularly high in rural areas, public transport continues to fall at 1% per year, and centralisation of resources often makes resources unavailable. Rural youth do not do well in exams or stay long at school. Rural wages are generally low and expenses high. Government has poured millions into inner city renewal, to the detriment of other areas. Open space is consistently eroded by farming methods. Youth clubs offer opportunity for social and political education, leisure-sport-recreation, self development in relation to others, and counselling. For experiences to be most meaningful, youth leaders need to look at environment (making the meeting hall more effective and attractive), premises (is it always necessary to meet in the hall?) and what to do (generate a programme giving opportunities for people to do things). If youth organizations are to help young people develop into responsible adults, then young people need to practice decision making in their clubs and learn how to get involved in village life and concerns. (BRR)

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"WHAT DO I DO WHEN I'VE UNLOCKED THE DOOR AND TURNED THE LIGHTS ON?"

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WHAT DO I DO WHEN I'VE UNLOCKED THE DOOR AND TURNED THE LIGHTS ON?

Recently, as part of a study of rural youth clubs, we asked a number of rural young people how they had spent the leisure time of the previous week, and we present three of them here.

	Kevin	Julie	Paul
Monday	Nothing	Listened to records	T.V.
Tuesday	Cricket, Football	Watched Television, Homework	T.V.
Wednesday	Youth Club	Watched Television Listened to the Radio	Youth Club Ramble
Thursday	Cricket	Babysitting	T.V.
Friday	Youth Club	Youth Club	Youth Club
Saturday	T.V.	Went to Norwich Played Squash	Work
Sunday	Fishing	Went for walk round village	Gardening

These were not, as you might think, examples carefully chosen to prove a point, but very representative of the people who answered our questionnaire and representative of many rural young people. What is it that leads to such a monotonously dreary way of life? And what of the usual picture we have presented to us of life in the countryside, the romantic, peaceful picture presented in various television advertisements, where the most romantic and pastoral of classical music accompanies images of girls in smocks or Laura Ashley dresses,

boys in cloth caps, haywains tumbriling forward laden with straw, and rippling streams - images used to promote a variety of products, chocolate, wool, milkdrinks, margarine, beer, bread and in recent years "Get away to the Countryside at Weekends with the Territorial Army".

Reality is of course very different from the romantic idyll. Many social changes have taken place in recent decades and are still taking place which lead to what can only be described as disadvantagement for rural young people. Let us headline some of these.

Agriculture .. .. Because of modern factory methods, agriculture has become mechanistic instead of labour-intensive. Work-force in Britain (2%) lowest in the World. Now demanding skilled or semi-skilled operatives and not a range of manual workers as in the past. Has ceased to be group activity, become individualistic, demanding higher levels of self-reliability.

Employment/Unemployment prospects for Rural Young People .. Unemployment biting progressively into areas away from the Home Counties, and many rural areas, particularly in the West Country, Wales and the

North are suffering. (1) Within the statistical areas of employment figures are pockets with poor accessibility up to 6% higher.

The rural young person may be the only unemployed person in his village, thereby lacking the peer support which is seen as so valuable in urban areas. The unemployed rural young person more likely to be subjected to traditional attitudes to work and unemployment. Even if he or she can find employment the rural young person is faced with a narrower range of job opportunities, and is less likely to find a high level of job satisfaction.

Lack of accessibility.. .. Public transport continues to fall at 1% per year, mostly in the rural areas. Existing transport is geared mostly to the working day, limiting leisure, sporting and educational opportunities, while the numbers of private cars has now stopped rising and may fall. These lead to a lack of mobility for rural people.

(1) In England and Wales, Cleveland 16.6%, Clwyd 16.2%, Merseyside 15.7%, Cornwall 14.8%, Mid Glamorgan 14.4%, Durham 14.0%, all compare adversely with the national average of 10.2% at February 1981. The general trend continues into the rest of Great Britain with Irvine in Scotland 21.1%, exceeded in Northern Ireland by Downpatrick 21.2%, Coleraine 21.9%, Omagh 22.6%, Ennis Killen 23.7%, Londonderry 24.8%, Newry 28.4%, Dungannon 31.9%, Cookstown 32.6% and Strabane a staggering 34.5%.

The dispersal of resources .. .. .. Because of planning policies and economic pressures each of the facilities for school, work, leisure, and domestic life are being "centralised", but frequently with different centres for different resources. (see figure 1)

The combination of these two leads to exclusion and deprivation.

Schooling .. .. Rural Young People do not do so well in exams or stay on so long at school - the system makes it difficult. Rural teachers have difficulties attending in-service training, distances strain the pupil-school-parent(s) relationships, after-school activities and clubs are prevented by a school run to bus timetables, and counterproductive tiredness results from long distances commuted (instances of up to 50 miles).

Rural Poverty .. .. .. This exists in pockets of the countryside, and generally rural wages are lower. Additionally, many things cost more in the countryside (sometimes over 5% for basic foods).

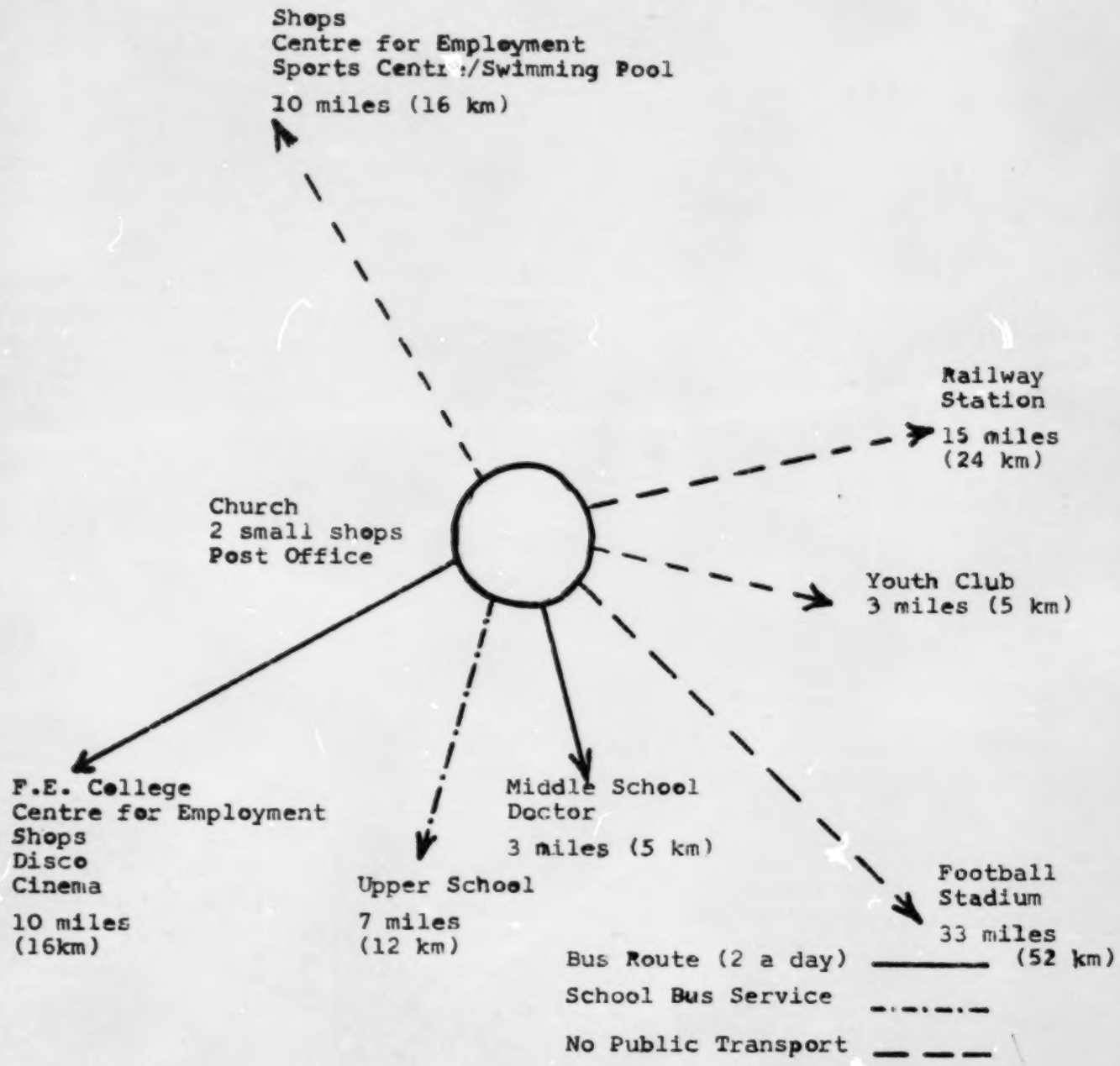

Figure /: Resources sought by Young People from one Suffolk Village

Inner City Policies .. .. Recent governments have poured millions of pounds into inner city renewal to the detriment of other parts of the country, through Rate Support Grant and through direct funding. (2)

Open Space .. .. Is being consistently eroded by modern farming methods, especially in cereal areas: meadows ploughed up, hedgerows and pathways disappearing, streams culverted, woodland devoted to pheasant and game. Now more public open space exists in London than in the whole of East Anglia.

To sum up what I have been saying, there are a number of social factors which lead to decreased opportunities in work, school, leisure and life generally for the rural young person, and frequently leisure activity is divided between the television and youth organisation because of their isolation from resources and entertainments, and being denied access to alternative activities. It is therefore my contention that the youth club has correspondingly heightened importance in the lives of young people, and consequently it is important that we should work to make these as good as we possibly can.

(2) For the year 1980-81 £140 million was allocated under the Urban Aid programme and £20 million under the partnership allocation. Compare this with the £18.4 million budget for the Development Commission (1979-80), the only government agency for the development of rural areas.

<u>But of course we are not in an ideal world</u>. To draw a word picture of a typical village club, we have a group of usually 10-30 young people, frequently of varying age range (sometimes as wide as 8-25 years). They meet under the leadership of volunteers, running a club on top of the strains of the busy working or housework week, who have not always been able to spare the time for part-time training. Their venue is a hall, as imaginatively designed as a shoe-box, multipurpose, dull and reflecting the aspirations and enthusiasms of none of the groups who use it.

In these circumstances it is very easy for imagination and vision to flag and to fall into the rut too many clubs fall in where central space is dominated by a full-sized table tennis table, used by two or maybe four people, a record player blares at one end, while a few desultory cans of coke and some soggy crisps are on sale at the other.

If we examine for interest, excitement, developmental content or stimulation, what we find can be seen in the space below:-

.....and yet, it's a pity Youth Clubs are frequently so uninspired and uninteresting when they could be interesting. Life can be an exciting adventure, especially at the stage of young people developing. The alive mind is one being regularly presented with challenges, physical or mental, ideas, insights, interesting people - opportunities to develop the personality. All aspects of life should present this; schooling, home and social life, hobbies, leisure and sports, interest at work. The lucky person can find satisfaction in several of these contexts; most will find satisfaction under some - the bored mind does not, or cannot, find satisfaction under any of these and this breeds boredom, antisocial or depressant behaviour.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES A YOUTH CLUB AIM TO OFFER?

These can be counted on the finger of one hand.

(a)	The opportunity to meet together, and develop human relationships (Social Education).	Thumb, principal and basic to the rest.
(b)	Opportunities to work with other young people for a common cause or purpose (Political Education).	First finger, the movement forward.
(c)	Opportunities for leisure, sport, recreation.	Second finger, central around which the rest revolve.
(d)	Opportunities for self-development in relation to others.	Ring finger, nearest to the person.

(e)	Opportunities to relate to adults who are capable of offering help (counselling).	Little finger, often out of sight, but required to balance the whole.

So much for the theory, but how does this work in practice? What you need to do is to be aware of each of these elements but at the same time realise that they interweave together. An activity pursued by a group of young people over a period of time provides opportunities for learning about relationships (social education), it can be an opportunity for them to practice the techniques and learning the skills required to work to a common purpose (political education). It is a leisure activity, it provides security and opportunities for individuals to express themselves, and could build up an atmosphere of trust so that individuals or groups know they can turn to the adult for counselling, help or advice. It is, however, important to bear all aspects in mind if the experience is to achieve its potential and to have had any lasting value to the young people. Take for example one village youth club who wanted to travel to a nearby town for ice skating. The leader was prepared to hire and drive a minibus, until she realised that by not spoonfeeding the young people but by together sorting out ways of using the inadequate public transport, she was actually being more helpful to them in their everyday lives where they have to cope with these inadequacies.

Rather than give lists of activity ideas, which are available elsewhere, especially in the books listed at the end of this paper, I will look at one or two areas and suggest some questions, and indicate some possible growth-points you might wish to explore.

THINK.....ENVIRONMENT

(this can stimulate or stultify)

People would consider it strange visiting a house if they found all the furniture stacked against the walls except for a big table stuck in the middle, preventing the use of the room for anything else. But so often we do that with youth clubs.

Why not exploit the flexibility of the building to create the space you need for what you are doing. The very lack of character of some places means that the club can introduce its own atmosphere and change it as often as required (see figure 2). Think of the way you use the space (would you have more room if you usedhalf the table tennis table squash-style up against a wall?), and do think of ways to break up the space into areas, whatever is appropriate to you.

Screens can be easily made, free-standing, hung from the ceiling, wedged between tables. They are particularly useful for catching stray darts or errant table tennis balls.

Borrow the playgroup's bookcase and stick plants on for a room divider.

Hang maize or bead curtains, old fly curtains or macrame as room dividers.

Scrounge an old carpet, to lay out to make a relaxed area or use it for tag-wrestling!

Use the drama group's old rostrum to give vertical interest to make a coffee bar.

Use variations in lighting fluorescent lights at the games end, coloured light bulbs, painted fluorescent tubes, or even an old standard lamp with a coloured bulb to give a diffused light at one end.

You might think of other things using what is there. If all else fails use stacks of chairs to divide the space to make it more interesting, and useful.

THINK.....<u>PREMISES</u>

Do you need to meet in the hall every week when the rent is an expensive item for many clubs? Do you need the hall at all? These questions sound like heresy but we know of clubs who have never had a village hall base.

Can you develop a network of communications among the membership so that everybody knows what's happening? (So that they know and take advantage of whatever's offered:- next Tuesday night's skating trip, meet at the church 7.30, or the chance to talk to Old Fred about Beekeeping and fishing at his house 8.00 on Thursday).

There are probably many people living near the club who have their own interests or hobbies, eg woodturning, self-sufficiency, archery, quilting, horse-riding etc, who, while

they don't want to commit themselves into attending regularly as a leader, would be very pleased to talk to a small group of members on a one-off basis, probably at their own home. These could prove most interesting "tasters" on a variety of topics and if a member is interested to pursue it further, have provided an introduction to a contact person.

What is going on anyway in the area which might be of interest? Can you twist the arm of the W.I. to invite those interested for the interesting basic cookery demonstration in June, and would the Football Club let them share the training film they've hired for next month? Do they know about the Mediaeval Fayre coming a few miles away, and do they know that the leisure centre 10 miles away is doing a special demonstration day on Synchronised Swimming? The leadership probably are more aware of what's going on because they have access to the information. Spread the news around!

How often do you need to hire the hall to use or are you merely using it as an indoor bus stop where people can just congregate?

THINK.....WHAT TO DO?

The trouble with the word 'programme' is, it suggests two things (i) everybody doing the same thing and (ii) having to do it willy-nilly. Try and generate a programme which gives opportunities for people to do things. Children around 8-12 often like something organised for them and will try new ideas with enthusiasm. As they get older, young people do not want to be pushed into things, but many individuals among them will have a go at things if it looks interesting.

Why not work on the Tom Sawyer method. If there is a new activity you feel could be introduced (and this works particularly well with artistic or creative ideas), find somebody who will just come in set up their things on some tables and start doing it, quietly encouraging the curious to participate, (or take this role yourself). If it looks interesting the odds are that someone will want to try their hand.....and if they don't, don't get discouraged, wait a week or two and try something else.

We used to work on the principle of periodic "happenings", at random intervals, but often about once a month. These were anything which was unexpected by the members which might be different or interesting. Sometimes it was somebody interesting who would come in and chat informally, a vivacious theatrical friend, the beat bobby, an old fellow from down the road, a "Hell's Angel" member of our old club. Anyone prepared to natter to anyone who wants to natter to them.

Now extend beyond the club night - what can the club do away from the premises which form an interesting programme on a wider basis? To start with try and organise something at least once a term, but see if you can build up to five or six things a year.

THINK.....MEMBERS ARE PART OF A COMMUNITY

Youth organisations are one of the agencies helping young people develop into an adult's life where they hopefully will be part of the community.

How much of a part do the members play within the community where they live? So often we hear of villages where the young people are blamed for everything that goes wrong (sometimes rightly) but this suggests a polarity which seems to deny their membership of the village of which they are an integral part. There are two parts to this which need to be looked at:

How much are the young people involved in decisions which affect them?

The young people need first to practice decision making in the club - plan outings, organise sports teams, decide club responsibility. Encourage all opportunities for leadership, and discuss openly and supportingly successes and failures. Are they on the youth club management committee?

How much are they involved in community decisions? Most villages have one or more community council, village hall committee, and playing fields committee which usually seek for representation from different organisations. If the youth club is represented it should be the young people, not the leader, or with the leader's support, so that the genuine thinking of young people is expressed. This may not be straightforward, the constitution may refer to membership being for people over the age of 18 or 21 - if so quote Magna Carta and insist on democratic rights!

<u>To what extent are the young people involved in village life and concerns</u>?

Young people as any other member of the community, have the right to the responsibilities of membership. There are jobs which used to be done from time to time, are they able to volunteer, do they have undesirable jobs thrust upon them? Within a village there are always opportunities for involvement by the members or residents. Are they aware of the current concerns and the general work of the Parish Council, and do they know how to express interest or concern? Do they also extend to the community the resources and facilities which they have?

<u>Book list</u>

Ken Webb (ed) "CLUBS!"

Roger Hope (ed) "KIDS!"

Information leaflets No. 1 52 week Programme

No. 2 Activities and Projects

All available from: NAYC, 70 St. Nicholas Circle, Leicester LE1 5NY.